

## Foundation improves lives of island animals

TARAH CAMPI Statesman Journal  
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Jefferson resident Cathy Sue Ragan-Anunsen spends a lot of time in front of her computer.

But it's not leisure time.

Ragan-Anunsen is the founder and CEO of the Esther Honey Foundation, which brings veterinary care to animals on the Cook Islands in the South Pacific.

Back in Oregon, Ragan-Anunsen is busy sending e-mail, making phone calls and handling finances about 10 hours each day, seven days per week.

That's what it takes to direct a nonprofit from thousands of miles away.

She's also the principal fundraiser, recruiter and Web designer.

And she isn't paid for any of it.

"Animal advocacy ... has been my passion for most of my adult life," Ragan-Anunsen said. "It's worth it."

### Filling a void

While vacationing in 1993 on the island of Rarotonga — with about 14,000 inhabitants, it's the region's main population center — Ragan-Anunsen befriended a dog named "Honey" and learned that there were no veterinary services on the islands.

Dogs wandered freely, and many were sick or injured. Even the tourists complained about police and residents shooting wayward dogs.

"There is a different mentality there," Ragan-Anunsen said. "A different sense of ownership."

Dogs may have a fine life wandering from beach to beach and getting treats from hotel guests, but when it comes to steady meals and veterinary care, few people were taking responsibility.

After returning to the Mid-Willamette Valley, Ragan-Anunsen got started on establishing what remains the islands' only veterinary hospital.

Esther Honey — the "Esther" portion of the name is after Ragan-Anunsen's grandmother and "Honey" is after that first island canine companion — opened its doors in 1995 in a small house used for spay/neuter surgeries and as a residence for volunteers. There was a "recovery lawn" out front.



### Special to the Statesman Journal

A girl swims with a dog in the Cook Islands. A nonprofit group called the Esther Honey Foundation, started by a Jefferson woman, works to improve animal welfare on the islands.

### How to help

To make a donation, volunteer or for more information, go to [www.estherhoney.org](http://www.estherhoney.org) or send e-mail to [info@estherhoney.org](mailto:info@estherhoney.org).

Esther Honey this year was named one of world's best 100 volunteer vacations to enrich your life; in National Geographic's 100 Best Vacations series.

Today, Esther Honey is a fully operational veterinary hospital that treats 1,500 to 2,500 animals annually.

The goal is to sterilize 70 percent of island animals, the point that animal-regulation officials generally consider the stabilization point for a population.

Ragan-Anunsen said that rate has been reached for dogs.

And since Rarotonga's animals for the most part are restricted to the island, there is less opportunity for them to breed with a new influx of animals.

In its 14-year history, EHF has treated 24,000 animals and sterilized 10,000 for free and has recruited nearly 200 veterinarians and hundreds of other volunteers from a dozen countries.

There is a full-time director on site, and other staff members rotate. The director receives a small stipend, but no one else is paid.

Ragan-Anunsen and her supporters organize veterinary teams, drugs, supplies and equipment.

Their motto is "changing the world for animals, one island at a time."

#### **A better world for animals**

In 2008, 66 volunteers traveled to the Esther Honey clinic for veterinary work and to teach humane-education and animal-care lessons in local schools.

The nonprofit also has conducted more than 100 "Vet Trek" clinics on the islands of Aitutaki, Atiu, Mangaia, Mauke, Mitiaro and Bora Bora to reach animals in remote locations.

The next trip is set for Aug. 17-24 in Mangaia.

EHF donors send an average of \$35,000 annually in drugs, supplies and equipment. In 2008, donations were \$47,850, and are on track to exceed that amount in 2009.

The foundation also found homes for more than 100 dogs and cats last year.

This summer, three Australian donors provided equipment for a complete X-ray department.

EHF's patients primarily are companion animals — strays and owned animals — but the vets have treated pigs, goats, horses, birds, fruit bats — even a seal and a hawkbilled turtle.

When looking to make her dream a reality 14 years ago, Ragan-Anunsen turned to contacts with advocacy groups in the Pacific Northwest that she knew through previous volunteer work.

Two of the original EHF board members are veterinarians based in Oregon: Kim Erbes of Salem Veterinary Emergency Clinic and Byron Maas of Bend.

Ragan-Anunsen coordinates drug and supply purchases through Salem Veterinary Emergency Clinic, and Erbes advises about how to run the clinic.

Board members praise Ragan-Anunsen's devotion.

"It humbles me to work with her," said Barry Nicholls, DVM, of Alabama, another board member.

The Cook Islands Herald recently addressed the difference the organization has made there.

"People take better care of their animals," said resident Tom Wichman.

"When an animal is sick, they know who to call: Esther Honey."